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ABSTRACT

Occasional Papers deal with varied aspects of librarianship and consist of papers that generally are too long or too detailed for publication in a periodical, or are of specialized or contemporary interest. This latest volume in the Occasional Paper series reviews the changing and cumulative institutional functions of libraries in Western civilization, tracing "The Seven Ages of Librarianship" from the working archives created by emerging civilizations through contemporary libraries that serve as instruments for social change. The metaphors of "lux" (light) and "latebra" (refuge) are used to characterize how the library serves today's communities. (AEF)

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Fiat lux, Fiat latebra

A Celebration of Historical Library Functions

By
D. W. Krummel

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Author's Note

This essay was first presented as a Sesquicentennial Lecture at the University of Alabama on October 8, 1983, through arrangements with its Associate Librarian, Arthur P. Young. I never found time over the next decade to expand it into a book as I had hoped, but a revised version proved a useful general historical overview for class discussions in a new library-school core course (LIS 390, "Libraries, Information, and Society"), which I helped develop in 1994. This text further revises both the lecture and the syllabus. Former students may recognize a few points that grew out of this and other of my classes.

Its subject is the historical context of the underlying options that have always governed the policies and practices of libraries, as summarized in the chart on the next page. My text is often simplistic, but I hope it frames some productive arguments. Librarians may be reluctant controversialists, but when pushed to the task (as they often are) they can be good at it, especially when well-armed. Even so, their more appropriate role has always been one of backing up controversy with insights based on earlier sources. The places they work thereby serve as an ideal that pervades civilized societies. The essay is meant as one explanation of the forces at work; there are many other possible explanations, of course.

Overviews make sense not in the abstract but in terms of the evidence. For a very brief summary of the history itself, to my thinking the best presentation is the "History of Libraries" article by Dorothy J. Schullian and Lawrence S. Thompson, in the International Edition of the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1978), vol. 17, pp. 310–17, but not in most other editions. For a more extended general survey, Fred Lerner's *The Story of Libraries: From the Invention of Writing to the Computer Age* (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1998) has much to recommend it. Beyond this, it never hurts to explore the vast literature of specialized studies on librarians, ideologies, practices, and institutions, which librarians ought to know how to find.

THE SEVEN AGES OF LIBRARIANSHIP

The changing and cumulative institutional functions of libraries in Western civilization

A. *Occurring most conspicuously in the years beginning roughly:*

B. *A kind of institution emerged, the objectives of which may generally be characterized as:*

C. *The institutional objectives were to serve as a:*

D. *The library was sponsored by the:*

E. *The library's contents were seen as comprising mainly:*

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.
1. BC 3000	I. ***Quotidian***	Working archive	Emerging civilizations	Evidence of consensual understandings
2. BC 300	II. ***Academic***	Center of culture	Society in search of authority	A supplement to discourse and dialogue
3. AD 500	III. ***Religious***	Archival shrine	Monastery (Benedictine)	a. Service to God b. Tradition as authority
4. AD 1350	IV. ***Humanistic***	Testimony to virtue	Renaissance prince	Munificence and beauty in content and form
5. AD 1600	V. ***Scientific***	Basis for knowledge and study	Personal scholar or institution (university)	The record of the advancement of learning
6. AD 1700, 1850	VI. ***Democratic***	Instrument for social betterment	Government, emanating from the (moral) polity	Public reading matter, in the interests of explicit values
7. AD 1910, 1945, 1970?	VII. ***Technocratic***	Instrument for social change	Government, emanating from the authoritative (functional) polity	All communications media, in the interests of implicit values

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Fiat lux, Fiat latebra

A Celebration of Historical Library Functions

Libraries, however we define them, exist and function in time and space. Their contents are meant to survive over history, and be where we want them to be. They are expected to last forever, like the pyramids of ancient Egypt, and if not to conquer the world like the Roman army, at least to be part of the world. Civilizations are memorialized in libraries, which are created for purposes of being available to readers today, and surviving for tomorrow. The vision that creates and builds them assumes the two dimensions of reality.

The *time* in question is either personal or historical, either what we experience directly ("interior, creative, discontinuous, and cruel, a harbinger of death,"[1]) or its cumulations ("progressive, perfectible, but also cataclysmic"). Similarly, the *space* is either personal—reading what is in front of us or writing what will be there—or social, political, and geographic—the power to listen and talk to others, locally or in Brussels, Jakarta, Chicago, Nairobi, or Caracas.

The larger worlds may be easier to grasp ethically (as we "think globally"), but it is in the small worlds that we address these concerns (as we "act locally"). The time we spend impatiently waiting for library deliveries, and unhappy hours in front of ugly books, ancient microfilm readers, or slow computers, are cases in point: one can do it but one would rather not. Library cooperation succeeds or fails as we move books across space, to save time. The ability of libraries to attract readers depends on the sites and layout of their buildings—the sense they make saves their readers' time—as too with computer interfaces. All libraries fail if their collections are destroyed, whether out of malice, negligence, or destructive use. Faith—involving the ethical agenda of society as a whole—builds libraries; and good efforts, realized in technical particulars, make them work. Both are needed; the latter being the emphasis in most library school programs, the former is the main consideration here.

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[1]The words are those of Georges Poulet, *L'espace proustienne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), as transl. by Elliott Coleman in *Proustian Space* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

Fiat lux: the first recorded words of the Almighty (according to the written record—preserved in libraries—of Genesis 1:3). Let there be light, to enrich experience, solve problems, answer questions, and lead to truth, whatever that is. This is Father Ong's "presence" of the word.[2] The analogy of light has a long history. Denys Hay uses it for his comments of the impact of Gutenberg's invention of printing.[3] The eighteenth century saw itself as the Enlightenment; and Goethe, its last great hero, died crying out for "Light, more light!" Later, E. P. Whipple proudly pronounced that books were "lighthouses in the great sea of time." (Andrew Lang dissented: lamp posts could also be used by drunken men, "for support rather than illumination.") The experience of discovery ("eureka!") still uses a lightbulb as its logo; universities place a lamp at the center of their official seals; and candles adorn library bookplates.

But light creates heat, which turns into the fires that destroyed so many libraries in times past, and in "slow fires" continues to consume more of them than we should like. Besides, there are many lights, some true and some false, and their light blinds us to the difference. (The predicament is memorialized in the smug heresy that ends many a pompous professor's seminar: "I have two confessions: first, half of what I've told you is false; and second, I don't know which half.") For good or bad, right or wrong, books and libraries are shaped by, and in turn shape, that history. One age's profundity seems pretentious to the next and nostalgic to the third. Once published and read, furthermore, writings are bread cast upon the waters, out of control, at the mercy of time. Like Heraclitus's river in whose waters one can never bathe twice, no reader or no generation will ever react to a book twice in the same way. The text may be the same, but it is read in ways that are unpredictable, capricious, always changing, so that the library itself becomes, as Borges proposes, "limitless and periodic."

Thus the second imperative of libraries, less celebrated but just as important: *Fiat latebra*.[4] Let there also be a refuge, a concealment, a hiding place, a latency, a way to be or a state of being latent. Let there be a place of rest, for the soldier to gain strength for the next battle, for cheese to ripen and

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[2]Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (1967).

[3]*Printing and the Mind of Man* (London: Cassell, 1967), p. xv. The catalogue, of first publications of major works of history, is thus testimony, not only to the light that has guided our civilization, but also to the survival of its evidence.

[4]The word "latebra" has its own latebra: it appears in most Latin dictionaries, but I owe thanks to David Bright for proposing it here. Over its quiet history, I fancy that it now has become a collective singular and no longer uses plural verb forms.

grape juice to ferment, for the contents of our barns to fertilize next year's crops. Let there be fuel to be ignited to create the light. "A library," in the dizzying rhetoric of Victor Hugo, "implies an act of faith, which generations yet unborn, sign in their night, in witness of the dawn."[5] Libraries need to be around, available, often best even unavailable but always around, maybe gathering dust, but there when needed. To information scientists, let there be storage to go with the retrieval.

Libraries give us both lux and latebra; both the light itself, and a refuge for and even from the light.[6] They serve today's communities by providing light today, and a haven that allows the light to be available tomorrow, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, forever, everywhere, and for everyone. The way in which lux and latebra have worked through history is the history of libraries, and by default of civilization itself. This all assumes the importance of libraries in transforming ideas, at least as they are defined in written records. Our inspired dreams of "libraries without walls"—institutions that function beyond their physical settings in serving larger goals—beg many questions, as does the mantra that "librarians should have opinions but libraries should not."

The point of this essay is that today's library problems result from goals that are, if not all things to all people, at least seven rather different things, defined historically through seven different ideals,[7] as suggested in the chart on p. 2. How one age led to the next can sometimes be hinted at; I wish there were room to say more. The main goal is to suggest the persisting virtues of each, since all of them are, necessarily, very much with us today.

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[5]"L'année terrible: April 1871," translated thus in Alexander Ireland, *A Booklover's Enchiridion*, 5th ed. (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1888), pp. 288–93.

[6]Lux and latebra may be useful to contrast, but they depend on each other. They are certainly not preemptive, like the classic Pythagorean dualities (finite/infinite, odd/even, one/many, right/left, male/female, static/moving, straight/curved, light/dark, good/evil, square/oblong). Nor is one necessarily old and the other new. They fit like symbiotic dualities (reader/text, oral/written, ear/eye—as if the other senses did not exist!—certainly book/computer, or even more basic, yin/yang). This essay is in essence a summary of the changing relationships over time.

[7] The number seven is not meant to be magical, or to go with the Wonders of the Ancient World, or deadly sins, or even with Shakespeare's views on human development (his latter ages in particular: we today are clearly not "sans everything"). There will likely be no. 8, although we today won't likely be around to grasp it.

1. The Quotidian Age, beginning *ca.* 3000 B. C.

The earliest libraries, from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, may be lost in the mists of time. This is to say that we do not know as much about them as we wish, although we do know a good deal about them. For instance, we know that the medium in ancient Egypt was papyrus; and that the library scribes were well situated politically, just next to the pharaohs.[8] In Mesopotamia the medium was baked clay tablets with cuneiform writing. Rediscoveries of vast collections, like the one at Ebla in modern Syria, dating from before 2000 B. C., add to the facts, but the sense of them as record-keeping agencies will change only as our sense of history may itself change. Some documents, like the "Gilgamesh" epic, are historical, political, religious, and literary all at once, so as to suggest that the cubbyholes of modern classification schemes may overlook as much as they specify.

With high rates of illiteracy, library access is a special privilege, both stabilizing and stultifying society (or such as least is one of our articles of faith). Literacy was dangerous, both for what it led people to imagine and for what it would cause them to forget. At the height of Athenian democracy, as oral traditions came to be superseded by writing, Socrates lamented the loss of the Homeric encyclopedia. He recalls the legend of Thoth, the Egyptian god of numbers, and logic, also of libraries (no easy candidate for biographical classifiers), whose invention of writing greatly bothered King Thamos:[9]

> Those who acquire [the art of writing] will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of by their own internal resources. What you have discovered is a receipt for recollection, not for memory. And as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation for it without the reality: they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society.

Through these events and attitudes, the library ever since has been torn between two ideals, one as an information center (whatever that is), the other as a cultural center (whatever that is).

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[8]My how things have changed! But perhaps for the better?

[9]Plato, *Phaedrus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 96. Quoted thus in Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 6.

2. The Academic Age, beginning *ca.* 300 B. C.

Such matters may be worrisome, but neither to Alexander the Great, nor to Aristotle. The great library of antiquity, the record of the Hellenistic world, saw its walls built in Alexandria, the city named for Aristotle's most famous pupil. (Put the world's greatest thinker at one end of the proverbial log as the teacher, and the world's greatest conqueror on the other end as his pupil, and what you get—lovely to suggest—is the world's greatest library.) "Man is by nature curious," Aristotle begins; and the scientists, scholars, and poets who made up his academy needed a library as they searched for truths, mostly abstractions that would survive in their own right through time and across space. In a sense, readers are important as never before, insofar as they were expected to extend the knowledge that was recorded in the library.

Aristotle's idea of what we now call research seems painfully modest by today's standards: a list of winners of the Delphic games, or a comparison of city constitutions. Such projects would rarely pass a rigorous grad-school committee defense today; two millennia were needed before society would be blessed with the methodological glories of the modern Ph.D. dissertation. Aristotle's thinking is still sensitive to trends and progress, where we've been and where we're going, and how we know this. Those privileged to use the library were clearly very special persons, to be respected by those who could not use it, but also with profound responsibilities of their own. As for the library, it needed to be cosmopolitan, built on records from throughout all history and across all the world, its latebra not necessarily for immediate use but available as needed, its lux the basis for continuing support from a grateful society.

A complete catalogue rather than a simple finding aid was also needed: arguments over its purpose—were Callimachus's *Pinakes* ("tablets") an inventory of holdings or a wish list?— beg the question as they assume that the blessings of learning are more learning. A catalogue presupposes "texts," something more than information and facts—writings stable in meaning, ostensibly in a permanent medium so they can be cited, and subject to criticism and revision. There are earlier catalogues than the *Pinakes*, from the ancient Near East in particular. But they were used, we suspect, mostly to find things, not to question or extend the findings except through actions outside the library. The *Pinakes*, one can argue, identify self-sufficient intellectual unities that we call texts. A "main entry" for an author—whether the scribe whose hand wrote the words, or the creator of the ideas and the prose, or the agency that stood behind the veracity of the content as "responsible party"—is assumed. A title is implicit, whether of the physical

form or the intellectual content, the medium or the message. Only as they were separated could the one lead to bibliographical description, the other to subject access. Above all, the purpose, in keeping with the agenda of research, is a dialectic based on premises found in texts and available in libraries, thus universal and invariable. In a sense the *Pinakes* also established the first major literary canon.

The library's demise, one of the great tragedies of human history, is explained in an anthology of pointed fingers, notable mostly for its imagination and righteousness: a fatuous Anthony swiping parts of it because the beautiful Cleopatra deserved beautiful things, an unruly populace ignoring it because it was not popular, Christians ruining it because it was not Christian, Muslims finishing the job because it was not Muslim. (The latter is celebrated in a classic slogan of intellectual freedom [and good anti-Muslim propoganda] attributed to the Caliph Omar: "destroy the books, the only one we need is the Koran.") The Alexandrian library thus became an ideal, persistent and noble, in the service to intellectual curiosity.[10]

3. The Religious Age, beginning *ca.* 500 A. D.

The dark ages following created the prototypical library of latebra, as devoted monks (we read about them in *The Name of the Rose*) obediently copied out texts, saving the heritage of antiquity for a day when it would be needed. The order is that of St. Benedict, the setting is the scriptorium. The contents survive, not in the original home at Monte Cassino in Southern Italy, but, thanks to copyists, in settings now spread across Europe and now often America as well. (The Muslims also did their share to help, thanks in part to Jews banished from eastern Christianity. This may be another story; the rich history of Muslim libraries still needs to be understood in its own right.)

Pagan texts from classical Greece and Rome thus survived alongside Biblical and early Christian writings, thanks to the monastic copyists. To be sure, this is no model for today's cause of intellectual freedom, except insofar as both presume a profound faith that, over the course of time, right should prevail over wrong—in a sense latebra is a form of justice. Man proposes, God disposes.

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[10]Jon Thiem, "The Library of Alexandria Burnt," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40 (1979), 507–26, is a lament over words that Shaw puts in Caesar's mouth: Theodotus sees the library burning, and remarks, "What is burning there is the memory of mankind." Caesar replies, "A shameful memory. Let it burn." *(Ceaser and Cleopatra*, Act II)

Librarianship thus becomes a service to God, something of a form of prayer. The humble copyists, writing down what they were instructed to write, laboring with their hands first and their minds second if at all—this image persists today, among other places as readers copy out call numbers, citations, and quotations (or as cataloguers pay homage to the divinely ordained rules set forth not in any decretals but rather in AACR-2—through which a grateful populace gives thanks for making libraries work). Service with the hands is service to God; and the written word is evidence of God at work. Nor is worship at the shrine of the Internet at all unknown today; it is often just as thoughtless as the passive reading of books that once delighted our well-behaved ancestors. The faith of the first Christian millennium is of course just as important to libraries as the rigorous inquiry and discourse of Socrates.

The library is of course a monastery, with a goal: cultivating plants for food and beauty, cross-breeding and in-breeding animals for work and meat. The places and their inhabitants likewise become useful, beautiful, and bred by intent. (This is now also true of other institutions, i.e., universities, the military, the civil service, business.) Libraries, like monasteries, often seem poorly funded and powerless, their riches hidden (at least librarians rarely end up in the top tax brackets). Their quiet but not inconsiderable power is still not to be confused with fecklessness. Other institutions depend on libraries for their lux, as libraries preserve the latebra that will provide, if not any factual evidence at the Final Judgment Day, at least the prospects of light for future generations.

4. The Humanistic Age, beginning *ca.* 1350

Surely enough, the light did reemerge. In fact, the Renaissance was in a sense born in libraries, as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Poggio, and other humanist poets and scholars sought out the evidence of a lost antiquity. Much as the loss of the Alexandria library is our symbolic legend of the decline of classical civilization, Boccaccio's visit to Monte Cassino is our symbolic legend of the Renaissance.[11]

The light thus shines again, refracted (history always refracts) so as to inspire the Western mind for the next seven centuries. Passions inspired the happy events, passions corrupted as usual by power, so as to tell us to distrust the altruism of a long line of philanthropists, from the Medicis, the Popes, the Duke of Urbino (Kenneth Clark sees his court as "a high point in the

[11]See John Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship* (Cambridge: University Press, 1908), vol. 2, p. 13, among a number of sources of this great story.

history of civilization"), King Mathias Corvinus of Hungary, and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, on up to Pierpont Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, Bill Gates, and many another robber baron whose name is memorialized on the entranceway to a library: by remembering them we thank them.

Their motives are intermixed with other motives, so as to underlie the visions that today are grouped under the name of humanism. The instinct to build and use libraries reflects and fosters the responsibilities, personal and social, of inquiring minds, reflecting what we know and use, and fitting in all imaginable visions of the future. The spirit underlies the great humanistic credos like these:[12]

- to Petrarch, in "planning human life that it may be fair and pleasing in the sight of God";
- to Juan Vives, "to restore man to humanity and raise him toward God";
- to Sir Philip Sidney, "to lead to the knowledge of man's self, with the end of doing well, and not only of knowing well";
- to Sir Thomas Elyot, "to prepare a man to be a prudent, just, and temperate magistrate";
- to Milton, to fit one "to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war";
- to Matthew Arnold, to "lead to a harmonious interrelation and expansion of all the powers which make for the beauty and worth of human nature";
- to Cardinal Newman, to "induce a philosophic habit of mind";

[12]See R. S. Crane, "Shifting Definitions and Evaluations of the Humanities from the Renaissance to the Present," in his *The Idea of the Humanities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), vol. 1, esp. pp. 5–6. It is well here to mention the distinction between humanists and humanitarians. Those who correctly use the Latin *humanitas* see its Greek counterpart not as *philanthropia*, signifying a kind of friendly spirit and good feeling towards all people without distinction, but as *paideia*, or "education and training in the good arts." Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights*, xiii.16) had earlier proposed that "Those who earnestly desire and seek after these are the most highly humanized. For the pursuit of that kind of knowledge, and the training given by it, have been granted to man alone among the animals, and for that reason it is termed *humanitas*, or humanity." See further Irving Babbitt, *Literature and the American College* (1908), esp. ch. 1–2, pp. 1–71. John Stuart Mill's dictum is no less germane (even if its gender usage needs to be overlooked): "Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians. What professional men should carry away from a University, is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge, and bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit."

- to Walter Lippmann, to preserve for man "the ideas, the premises, the rationale, the logic, the method, the values" upon which our society was founded.

In other words, as Spinoza proposed, our duty is nothing less than to "occupy the two extremes of any spectrum and all intermediate points." The humanist thus sees libraries not so much as potential tributes to personal vanity, but rather as repositories of the lux and latebra that make for a responsible humanity.

The Renaissance love for antiquity assumed that physical objects provided the crucial evidence. Literacy was further assumed to be personal rather than social; it had always been scarce; no decline in it can be tied to the decline of the Alexandrian library. Nor is there much evidence to suggest that the princely collectors of the Renaissance saw a more literate or enlightened general citizenry. Thanks in part to the rise of literacy, their modern successors are often a different matter. In time the humanist princes themselves learned to read; and not surprisingly, more aspiring humanist princes emerged. The times were right for learning, literacy, and libraries. Libraries with no walls, but a social mission instead, came later. One still also sees a spirit of sharing, as the manuscript evidence of ancient repositories was copied into physical forms to inspire and instruct readers to become virtuous.

Gutenberg's landmark invention, around 1450, by no means arrived in the middle of a desert; but it soon accomplished what it has been doing ever since. Activities, lines of reasoning, stories, all reach more readers thanks to printing, as they conquer space more widely and time more quickly. The impact is as vast as it is confused. Did it foster the Reformation? Luther surely knew how to use the written word to his advantage; but how many potential Lutherans could read in the 1520s? The answer may be "more than we think." So now we find ourselves playing chickens and eggs. Enough of them must have been able to, and before Luther got through with them a lot more of them could: we suspect this modest hypothesis to be true, even if testing it may need to depend on distinguishing in public records between written signatures and an X.[13]

An "information explosion"—the boom in printed texts, often seen as reason for today's library challenge and predicament—seems to have taken place in waves, the earliest dating somewhat after 1500, well after Gutenberg.

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[13]This is the subject of Elizabeth L. Eisenstein's classic study of *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

The vernacular languages did come to be fixed in grammar and orthography over the sixteenth century, as did the design of the alphabet in fonts of movable type, and even (the argument is convoluted but credible) the modern national states themselves. The particulars vary widely: France and Portugal came together but Germany and Italy did so mostly as linguistic but not political entities; for England and Scandinavia the factors were arguably geographic; with Holland, Spain, and most of Eastern Europe the debate continues today in regional politics.

The impact of printing on science is harder to describe. Once available, sources could be compared, and the contents verified. Copernicus, for instance, working in the years just after Gutenberg, saw his major work published, but his sources were shaky and his writings not widely circulated. One further hears that the medieval crafts were co-opted by modern capitalism because of the printing press: the argument would look better if there were good evidence that trade secrets were ever extensively described in print, at least before the eighteenth century. In contrast, the proposal that the printing press helped lead to systematically maintained business records, however intricate, seems persuasive.

The decline of the "arcane" sciences—alchemy, astrology, sorcery, perhaps even holistic medicine—is harder to study since their latebra is so poorly preserved in libraries. Another result, as we are discovering, was the decline in the art of memory. (The effect is neatly stated in our adage, "The nice thing about an encyclopedia is that it knows, and therefore I don't need to.") In a sense printing, as it demotes the art of memory, enhances the lux as it also demands the latebra of libraries. Organize the latebra and provide structure and access through classification, arrangement, reference service, or other means—the library is now clearly a different place.

Gutenberg's impact remains exciting to think about, partly because we today see the rise of electronic technology as a comparably important event in human history. The matter must be studied over a broader terrain than we rather impatiently ask for. In order to understand the impact of printing on the western mind, we must look at both the lux it stimulated, and the latebra that it created.

5. The Age of Reason, beginning *ca.* 1600 A. D.

The Renaissance loved libraries, but it was the subsequent Age of Reason, well aware of the blessings of the printing press, that learned to cherish the content of libraries as creations of the human mind. Francis Bacon's vision of the advancement of learning predicated three mental faculties: reason,

memory, and imagination, of which the foremost, naturally, was reason. The library may have been an institution of memory, but its resources were a necessity, and learning itself amounted to an enhancement of its resources. The faculty of reason, as articulated in Descartes's studies of method, produced the first great treatise on library method, Gabriel Naudé's *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque* (Paris, 1623).

Great scholars were also famous for their own personal collections, most of which ended up in institutional libraries. Most early humanistic libraries fell into disuse on the death of their patron: in contrast, great collections of the Age of Reason often survive to today. Typical is the Bodleian Library in Oxford, founded out of a symbolic incident: Sir Thomas Bodley, on hearing that Duke Humphrey's collection was forgotten, boldly vowed to provide its funding—and along with it the rules and purposes ("Pay the piper, call the tune" is to be found in libraries not only in quotation books). The correspondence between Bodley and his librarian, Thomas James, will frighten the faint of heart, but the library survived and is still flourishing. An adventurous spirit of growth and inquiry led to vast libraries filling huge rooms with very high ceilings (requiring in turn the legendary library ladders, from which several great librarians fell to their deaths). The finest tribute a scholar could receive—said of Scaliger at the beginning of the Age of Reason, of Leibniz at the end—was that he was the most learned person in the world, a walking library of the lux and latebra of the classics, religion, poetry, science, not to mention politics.

There are even a few hints of an awareness of information in the abstract, apart from physical books or written texts. The French doctor Théophraste Renaudot envisioned an agency for providing facts needed by the poor (along with, curiously, the first pawnshop). His British counterpart was John Dury, whose *The Reformed Librarie Keeper* (1650) introduced the idea of a "publick stock of Learning." The explorers who planted flags worked hand in hand with the missionaries who planted books and printing presses for the church, be they Jesuits most everywhere, or the Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge, whose program included the "parochial libraries" that Thomas Bray fostered in the Mid-Atlantic colonies of colonial America.

Similar zeal, softened over the eighteenth century, led architects to make love to the cause of learning in their own way, by creating the breathtaking monastic libraries of central Europe—St. Gallen, Admont, Wibling, dozens of others—a sensuous epidermis of books to read and become learned, as surely as pilgrims might touch the relic of a saint in the nearby sanctuary and become miraculously healed, all in a colorful setting of swirling and

richly colored lines twisting upward to God. Books were a part of this profusion, since the search for truth was indeed part of the search for God.

The collapse of the high library walls of the Age of Reason began with the Battle of the Books. Jonathan Swift placed it in the Library of St. James in London; in fact it was a series of messy skirmishes over several decades. It was a momentous event; we are still sorting out the effects. Sir Isaiah Berlin saw it as leading to "The Divorce between the Sciences and Humanities."[14] In the politics of scholarship it has never been far beneath the surface. Much as we might wish that its scars might go away, they may not, for reasons that involve the crucial role of libraries in original thought. Arguments being sound when they are shown to be based in best evidence, humanists, simply stated, look for the earliest source, while scientists need the most recent source. Humanists find both primary and secondary sources in the library; scientists find mostly the secondary, the primary coming instead from the lab. True in general, but also mischievous to the librarian's cause in that it is not always so.

The learned latebra of the Age of Reason may have smothered all too much of the lux. But the lux was hardly extinguished; its survival suggests the need for a balance between the two, informed by the critical mind. Thomas DeQuincey separates "the literature of knowledge" (generally scientific knowledge, from which one learns what purports to be timeless truths) and "the literature of power" (from which one exercises and expands one's "latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite," as one reacts, whether to promotional or polemical writings, or to artistic prose).[15] This distinction may be useful, although it is hardly preemptive. Nor should the joyous lux that we experience in the literature of power ever be allowed to suppress the latebra that is a necessary requisite of the literature of knowledge. The latebra is celebrated by the astronomer Johannes Kepler, who in introducing his discoveries of the planetary orbits melodramatically announced:[16]

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[14]Second Tykociner Lecture, Urbana: University of Illinois, Department of Electrical Engineering, 1972; reprinted in his *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), pp. 80–110.

[15] From his famous review of the Roscoe edition of *The Works of Alexander Pope*, the opening article in the *North British Review*, 4 (August 1848), 14–15, reprinted in the 1858 collected edition of his writings as "The Poetry on Pope."

[16]"Proemium" to the *Harmonice mundi* (1619).

> The die is cast; my book is written, to be read either now or by posterity, I don't care. It may wait for a century for a reader, much as God has waited six thousand years for an audience.

Archer Taylor saw the early eighteenth century as marking a break in the "continuity of tradition" of bibliography. The American and French revolutions were soon to take place. The malignant irony of Pope and Voltaire finds its counterpart in innovations that arose not out of the "pure" science of the Royal Society in London, but rather out of the social and technological agenda of the Lunar Society in the English Midlands. The great mid-century French *Encyclopédie,* rich in literary polemics, also includes the amazing volumes of *Planches,* engravings that illustrate the bourgeois crafts and identify the marketplace for the French revolution.

"What harm can a book do when it costs a hundred crowns?" Voltaire asked. "Twenty volumes folio will never cause a revolution; it is the little portable volumes that cost a few pennies that are to be feared." The latebra is all too easily identified with the folios: its counterparts today are our great research libraries. In contrast, Voltaire's portable volumes—the flood of pamphlets well under way at the time of his death, leading up to the French revolution—all too easily suggest the fanzines, junk mail, and teeming "information overload" of today. The dichotomy is often false: the pamphlets are likely to reflect and provide as much latebra as the folios reflect and provide lux. Does lux equal immediacy, latebra obsolescence? The burden of saving the evidence to sort things out, ironically but not untypically, falls on the library.

Alfred North Whitehead proposes that "all ideas which are not utilized are . . . harmful."[17] His corollary—"knowledge keeps no better than fish"—can perhaps be passed off as Oxbridge rhetoric (especially as it is followed by a spirited defense of Greek and Latin in the school curriculum). But even the most bemused information scientist can hardly resist agreeing with another Whitehead proposal that a "merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth." As the latebra has expanded it has had an increasingly rough time of it. On the one hand is the cause of utility and practicality. Library use studies confirm that new publications are more widely used than older ones, and from such data obsolescence formulas are easily derived. On the other hand, the surging tide of publication demands simple formulas that become even simpler. On the third hand—librarians have only two hands. The next irony, then, is that librarians often begin the

[17]Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 6.

day championing the lux, and end it under a gloomy cloud praying for more of it to recede into latebra.

6. The Age of Democracy, beginning *ca.* 1700 and manifest by 1850

The Battle of the Books foreshadowed the demise of established intellectual aristocracies, as in time it led to the rise of modern political states—both the new nations that arose out of the democratic revolutions, and the established ones as they adapted to newly enfranchised citizenries. Both recognized the need for institutions that survive to today. These include the following:

- **National libraries**. Brief sketches suggest their variety, as they also set the context for different conceptions of library activity:
  —In the United States, the Library of Congress was founded in 1800, primarily for the legislative branch of government and based on gifts of Thomas Jefferson. The collections grew in the nineteenth-century under Ainsworth Spofford, the services under his twentieth-century successor, Herbert Putnam, who inherited programs (e.g., service to the blind, cataloguing operations, the copyright office) that were expanded to support the nation's libraries at large. Recognition as our national library continues to be shared with the National Library of Medicine (established by John Shaw Billings after the Civil War as the U.S. Surgeon General's Library), and the National Agriculture Library.
  —In Great Britain, the British Museum was established in 1753 as both museum and library. Its collections flourished under Sir Anthony Panizzi in the mid-nineteenth century, who developed its cataloguing code (the "Ninety-One Rules"), and promoted the building, with its landmark circular reading room. The museum and the library were administratively separated some years ago, and the British Library now occupies a new building of its own.
  —In France, the Bibliothèque Nationale was created out of the collections of the nobility and clergy confiscated after the revolution, so as then to create the world's largest library. The library is now finding its way into a new home called the Bibliothèque de la France.
  —In Germany and Italy, regional states developed their own libraries (the largest being the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich), based on earlier princely collections. In Italy several institutions claim the title of Biblioteca Nazionale; in Germany the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, once split by the Iron Curtain, is today reemerging as a national repository.
  —In Russia, the Lenin Library in Moscow, during the USSR era the

world's largest library, is uncertain in its future. Its name change is obvious and its size will continue to be imposing.

—Other countries of Europe include the Bibliothèque Royale in Belgium, Det Kongelige Bibliotek in Denmark, and the National Széchényi Library in Hungary. Elsewhere in the world, national libraries were created on the advice of American and European librarians, among them the National Diet Library in Tokyo and those of most Latin American and African nations.

- **National bibliographies**. These describe a country's publishing output, whether of books in print, or new titles from the country's booktrade or relating to the country, or copyright deposits, or acquisitions of the national library or a group of libraries. Such lists are almost all selective, because of limited funding if not government controls, even if they will all naturally exclude underground publications. Universal Bibliographical Control (UBC) has arisen to merge the national records, along the way hoping to reconcile languages, traditions, and cataloguing practices that often reflect basic national differences, so as to serve common international interests.
- **National literatures**, to honor a country's major authors and thinkers and encourage further creative efforts. The roots of the concept were nurtured by the series of "Republics" developed by the seventeenth-century Dutch publishing family of Elzevir. National literatures typically presume a common language.
- **National copyright legislation**, to protect literary, intellectual, and artistic property. Modern copyright dates from the sixteenth-century royal privileges awarded to printers of the Company of Stationers. With the "Queen Anne's Statute" (1710) rights came to be vested instead in the author. Further refinements—coverage of other media, along with performance rights, and distinctions between copyrights, patents, and trademarks—came about mostly at the national level, subject to continuing efforts toward international reconciliation. (Even now, of necessity, it is the physical embodiments that are covered, at least insofar as they can exist in space and survive over time.)
- **National learned institutions**, for promoting research and scholarship. Institutes were set up for special projects—for instance to edit and publish celebrated historical documents (e.g., the British "rolls series," the *Monumenta Germaniæ historica*, later projects in the United States leading to the work of the National Historic Publications and Records Commission)—or to use special bequests, such as the one bestowed to the United States by James Smithson (1846). Other activities, especially after World War II, have been of a scientific and technological nature, for instance those supported by the National Science Foundation or the

National Research Council in this country, the CNRF in France, or the Max Planck Institute in Germany. They all enrich library holdings, as they identify, attract, fund, and often create the documents that make the findings part of the political world of public knowledge.

- **National technical universities**. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, these were conceived around academic disciplines and departments, those duchies, principalities, and fiefdoms of the world of learning, so as to address specialized activities that could appeal to recognizable public needs rather than to any ideal of the unity of knowledge. Much as the great new university of the Age of Reason was the one at Leiden, and of the Enlightenment at Göttingen, so the nineteenth century saw a model created by Humboldt in Berlin: a confederation of self-sufficient (and self-important) communities of scholars, each community with its seminar of specialists and aspirants, each seminar with its research institute, each institute with its special library for internal use. In the United States, the Morrill Act of 1862 established the land-grant universities, originally focused on agriculture and mechanics (as distinct from the private universities, which trained mostly for the ministry). Out of such settings modern research universities were born; and out of their research programs came the great and growing flood of scholarly journals, *Acta, Annales, Anzeiger, Beiträge, Bulletins, Ezhegodniki, Hudebníny, Intelligenzblätter, Newsletters, Proceedings, Rassegne, Reviste, Roczniki, Tijdskrifte,* and *Zeitschriften,* indispensable media of scientific communication that glorify learning and serve the busy scholars who keep up-to-date in their fields, as they also devastate library budgets, devour library buildings, and dement library cataloguers.
- **National archives**. Countries often paired the national library with a repository to document the workings of the government itself, e.g., in Great Britain, the Public Records Office alongside the British Library, in France, the Archives Nationale alongside the Bibliothèque Nationale/Bibliothèque de la France. In the United States, the Library of Congress is complemented by the National Archives, established between the two world wars in connection with federal government paperwork management.
- **National educational systems**. Responsibility for childhood education, long assumed by the church, has slowly moved to the secular government, partly to serve voter enfranchisement. Local schools are complemented by national standards, with the balance of power often determined by funding.

The most conspicuous impact was the recognition that literacy was one of the special distinctions of a democratic society. The stability, the continuity through regeneration, made possible only with a literate citi-

zenry, is accepted as a cornerstone of civilized society. (Interestingly, Charles Knight, champion of popular literacy in nineteenth-century England, also published Charles Babbage's description of his "analytical engine," the precursor of the modern computer.) The context of Victor Hugo's passionate pronouncement (above) needs to be seen as an eloquent address to an anarchist who has thrown a bomb that destroyed a library during the Communard riots in Paris of 1871; when asked, "why did you do this," the anarchist responds, "I can not read."

- **Public libraries.** It was mostly over the last half of the nineteenth century that these became a civic necessity. Their immediate precursors, which often continued so as to complement them, were the many kinds of "social" libraries, joint-stock or subscription institutions whose members enjoyed various loan privileges or access to non-circulating ("reference") collections. (As early as his *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin discusses his "Junto," its tribulations and successes.) The American public library finds a counterpart in England, where the work of Edward Edwards led to the Library Act of 1850, and soon to major libraries, mostly at first in the industrial Midlands.

  Public libraries elsewhere are often defined not by tax support, but rather by access. (In France, for instance, "publique" is distinct from "municipale," which speaks of funding.) The value of public support at the local level is reinforced by the experience in socialistic countries whose institutions were mandated nationally. Generally the strongest traditions have been found in northern Europe and, not surprisingly, in countries with distinguished newspapers.

In the United States, the landmark event was the founding of the Boston Public Library of the 1850s. The heroic founders, in Boston and soon across the country, need to be honored, but the rationale is even more important. Institutions, created by an enlightened citizenry, would produce an even more enlightened citizenry, in need of still more to read. Thanks to the industrial revolution and its improvements in printing technology, more reading matter was available, so as in turn to reinforce the democratic institutions.

New professions emerged, librarianship among them, leading to formal training programs, in the United States thanks in no small degree to the brilliant, outrageous, and legendary Melvil Dewey. Previously the title of Librarian was often assigned as a sinecure, sometimes to committed or brilliant practitioners, either librarians or in other subject disciplines, but sometimes to caretakers, whether of no distinction or of dubious honors. (The German philosophers Leibniz and Lessing, also the brothers Grimm are among the distinguished lot. The latter are forgotten, save perhaps for

Casanova, whose library achievements may be irrelevant. The library careers of still others, among them David Hume, Goethe, and the composer Hector Berlioz—not to mention Chairman Mao and J. Edgar Hoover—may have informed their later work, in mysterious ways). Dewey's quirky egalitarianism, mixed with the vision of the library as a service orientation, somehow led to a strongly feminine character of the public library world in particular, which emerged over the last decades of the nineteenth century.

The dignity of libraries thus reflects a liberal political philosophy. In a democratic society the library needed to be "free as the town pump": and "if all of mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind."[18] The result was a market where ideas were traded openly: "If the book be false in its facts, disprove them; if false in its reasoning, refute it. But for God's sake, let us hear freely from both sides."[19] The plebiscite of ideas required nothing more or less than freedom of access to the latebra of civilization—and best in forms that could be counted on to be invariable over time. In Jefferson's words:[20]

> Books constitute capital. A library of books lasts as long as a house, for hundreds of years. Is it not, then, an article of mere consumption but fairly of capital, and often . . . their only capital.

To the nineteenth-century's inspired romantics, the elevation of the human spirit moves from the social to the personal in the functional agenda of libraries. What is involved is nothing less than

> a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source of sweetness and light.[21]

Matthew Arnold thus inspires the classic vision of the librarian as educator, guide, counselor, in the interests of personal betterment. Readers in search

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[18]John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ch. 2.

[19]Thomas Jefferson, quoted in *AB Bookman's Weekly*, January 25, 1971.

[20]Letter to James Madison, September 1821.

[21]Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869).

of cheap novels were not always banned, but when admitted it was in hopes of elevating their tastes.

Faith in intellectual freedom emerges as the most important heritage of the Democratic Era of libraries. Ray Bradbury suggests that "the magic is only in what books say." But it is the physical object that permits it to be said, thanks to three circumstances: first, books have "quality," "texture," "pores," "life under the glass, streaming past in infinite profusion"; second, readers enjoy "leisure, the ability to say to [the books], 'hold on a moment,'" since they "can be beaten down with reason"; and third, as readers we also enjoy "the right to carry out actions based on what we can learn from the interaction of the first two."[22]

The blessings of democracy can also lead to Tocqueville's "tyranny of the majority," particularly in an age driven by commerce. Dennis Potter's deathbed observation may be well to remember: "The pressure to maximize your audience at every point . . . is the very antithesis of discovering what you don't know."[23] Censorship emerges as one of the prices of liberty in accommodating those who boldly envision acting locally as synonymous with thinking globally. Restricting access is irrelevant where there are no libraries, or when there are and there is a low level of literacy. But it works on both the lux, which is manifestly threatening, and the latebra, which always haunts troubled minds. The advent of printing simply accelerated fears, and sometimes created them as well. Gutenberg led to the printing that supported the religious battles of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Attempts to define the Kingdom of God on earth prove counterproductive over the course of history, whether through the *Index liber prohibitorum* of the Roman Catholic church, or through various Protestant injunctions, or through the fears that inhabit frightened souls, whether in Islam, China, or wherever.

Political censorship slowly emerges out of religious censorship: the event can be read into the rise of newspapers in the early seventeenth century; the roots in the English broadside ballads are apparent. The power of ephemeral printing, well understood in Voltaire's sentiments, was widely employed in later uprisings, in France during the uprisings of 1789, 1848, and 1871, elsewhere with the various movements inspired by Karl Marx. In America, Tom Paine's *Common Sense* was more effective than the censorship that is implied in the Stamp Act.

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[22] *Fahrenheit 451*, pp. 74–75 in the 1975 ed.

[23] Quoted is his *New York Times* interview, July 30, 1994, p. 18.

Moral censorship is close in the background, sharing the stage with religious and political censorship: Samuel Pepys is known today both for his richly obscene diaries, and for his library of printed ephemera. Overtones of parody are suggested in this celebrated warning in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775), as the library enters the picture:

> Madam, a circulating library in a town is an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year! And depend on it, Mrs Malaprop, that they who are fond of handling the leaves, will long for the fruit at last.

The flowers may have become favorites of Queen Victoria, but the roots are perennials, deeply planted in the local communities.

"The right book for the right reader at the right time": the classic adage incorporates the vision of personal betterment that commits librarians to service as well as to the battle against censorship. Out of the ambiguities arise other bold adages: librarians have opinions, libraries do not. The opinions, values, and commitments that result from the interaction between the text and the mind of the reader: these remain the primary objective of libraries. But the agencies that foster these noble visions often have their own agendas, which identify their needs for survival. If Michael Harris is right about the Boston Public Library, the accusation can also apply more widely. The aristocracy of our first two ages of library history, the theocracy of the third, the meritocracies of the next two are the problem, the bureaucratic and commercial institutions of our own era too. The poet Karl Shapiro further eulogizes the vision:[24]

> Service with no motive . . . Incredible library where ideas run for safety, place of rebirth of forgotten anthems . . . platform for uninhibited leaps. . . . Room also of the secret catalogue, room of unlisted books, those sought by police. . . . Sutras on spools of film. All this courtesy and all this trust, tons of trash and tons of greatness, burning in time with the slow cool burning, burning in the fires of poems that gut libraries, only to rebuild them, more grand and palladian, freer, more courteous, with cornerstones that say: Decide for yourself.

7. The Age of Technology, beginning *ca.* 1945

A new era has entered, so quietly as to leave us first asking how it is really different from what went on before, then give us answers that both horrify

[24] *The Bourgeois Poet* (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 20–21.

and excite. The upheavals in libraries and the world at large may be new, but both of them are well acquainted with upheaval and controversy. Being in "the eye of the storm" makes it all the more urgent to ask what we are doing, as it makes the question itself all the more confusing.

The modern library celebrates a profusion of recent achievements that lead us to see it, no longer as an archive, or a seminar, or a monastery, or a museum, but rather as an engine. Computers, with their exhilarating possibilities, also make it harder to ask where we are or what we should be doing, other than to follow the keyboard commands. Might the information overload also be making ours a society of *idiots savants*? Our era is scarcely the first to lament the departure of the last vestiges of the unity and integrity of learning. In any event, much as the minds and libraries of the middle ages were driven by visions of God, or the last century by visions of democracy, so the vision of our era is one of technology. Alternatives may be allowable, but not to the detriment of the major vision.

Large questions remain. Are knowledge and information identical; is the promotion of reading the same as the promotion of surfing; if the medium is the message (whatever that means), is not abstract thought the same as clicking the mouse? Does growing up require growing rich?[25] Or is it a monastic conceit even to ask these questions? Is intellectual freedom compatible with a laissez-faire free market, communitarian ideals and worry about tyranny of the majority with concerns for money, or even with the redistribution of income? Is the dialogue of sharing, based on mutual respect, compatible with the dialogues of sales or of political power? The library as devoted to the "common good": is this just a romantic dream? The libertarian sentiments of Jefferson and Lincoln, Locke and Mill, such as have driven the forces that created modern libraries, thus often seem either tired and irrelevant, or exciting and essential to sustain and redefine.

Proliferating research and enhanced access—what verb ties them: does the research necessitate the access, foster it, increase it? With written records (to summarize) time disappears; with printing, space disappears. Formal solutions to problems of human imperfection, proposed in written records,

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[25]Howard R. Bowen (*The Costs of Higher Education* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980]) reflects on conditions that may have a valid parallel in libraries: "The basic principle of college finance is very simple. [The goal is excellence; and excellence costs money.] Institutions raise as much money as they can, and spend it all. Cost per student is therefore determined primarily by the amount of money that can be raised. If more money is raised, costs will go up: if less is raised costs will go down."

become the more powerful in print, as transmitted across space for wider audiences to notice, and as surviving in time so as to allow for deliberation. They proliferate; the publishers' press runs get smaller and the prices higher: the latebra becomes more vast, the lux gets dimmer. Change, as a synonym for commerce, may appear to work against the latebra (for instance as reformatting of media comes to be understood), although its impact on the lux is no less profound (for instance as it creates psychedelic delicatessens and fifteen-minute fame). Invention—in this case of the communications media for transmitting lux and (admittedly the best thing we know of[26]) for preserving latebra—has become the mother of necessity.

Marshall McLuhan's idea of a knowledge "implosion"—an explosion on film run backwards—is not a bad one. New media for library collections are no longer books and periodicals, but now also films, recordings, and computer databases, while new disciplines are created out of materials once thrown away: once discovered, latebra, like other inventions, becomes a necessity. Our ideal of Universal Bibliographical Control grows out of our professional responsibilities: but as a result our ethical agenda can also foster an increasingly "touchie-feelie" readership. Can one agree with Daniel Boorstin, that information works to suppress knowledge?[27] As our attention span is reduced to nanoseconds, curiosity becomes all the more an imperative, as the resources to serve it become all the more problematical—and (if others would appreciate the point!) a compelling argument, for libraries and for their ethical foundations.

Our answers to these predicaments reflect three plans. The first is to meet the challenge head-on. Improve efficiency, develop better systems, economize, computerize, miniaturize, and cooperate. (And go to library school to learn the One True Way, which, as we defend it as being "scientific," also rather echoes the Age of Reason.)

The second is to define and merge, eliminate the unproductive and suppress the unmanageable. Ortega would have the librarian become an intellectual policeman, a "master of the raging book."[28] After all, no credible ideal of latebra would argue for preserving the whole record of human

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[26]In *Fahrenheit 451*, of course, Ray Bradbury offers another solution; like most everything else, it recalls Victor Hugo's dictum: "a library is an act of faith."

[27]Daniel Boorstin, *Gresham's Law: Knowledge or Information?* (Washington: Library of Congress, Center for the Book, 1979).

[28]"The Mission of the Librarian," *Antioch Review*, and widely reprinted.

civilization. Isn't the real problem that everyone wants to talk and nobody wants to listen; too many authors, too few readers?[29] We've all seen lots of latebra in libraries that looks mighty unlikely to contain much lux: all that we need now is to figure out what is "significant." And *quis custodiet ipsos custodes*: who will select our book selectors? Who is to define significance; and what right have I to expect anyone to accept my choices? Given Aristotle's proposal that "man is by nature curious," can Zero Population Growth in libraries ever be compatible with freedom of expression?

Small wonder then the third plan could be the most hopeful of all, even if it is surely the oddest: Borges's Library of Babel, "limitless and periodic"; its labyrinthine "circumference of the . . . consummate center . . . inaccessible." Borges's "solitude rejoices in this elegant hope"[30]; but can we live with all this joy? Will Universal Bibliographical Control give way to Cosmic Bibliographical Control; may we not also need to admit that concerns for the universal capture our imaginations because the local is beyond our grasp?

"Out of our pasts we recreate our futures." Thomas Hobbes's truism tells us that libraries—and information and media centers, and archives, and museums, and other related institutions whatever their name, as well as our visions of all of these—serve at once:

- as indispensable record-keeping agencies, such as begin with and in fact define civilization itself;
- as requisites for inquiring minds, both reflecting what we know and use, and fitting in all imaginable visions of the future;
- as faith during our dark ages, recognizing the need for labors of love to guide and reassure;
- as joys of the experience of possession, whether in reading or ownership or both, and for the betterment of humanity more than as evidence of human vanity;
- as rationality in a perfectible world, without which we are denied many scientific blessings (libraries among them);
- as basic necessities to democratic societies, which depend on access to ideas as they redefine their consensus; and
- as technological artifacts, through which our activities become the more manageable, whatever our goals always may be.

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[29]Milan Kundera has a nice discussion of "graphomania" in Part IV (Lost Letters, 9) of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980) pp. 91–92.

[30]"The Library of Babel" has escaped from the labyrinth so as to need no citations, only explanations.

The "seven ages" idea is meant not as a grand historical design.[31] But it could still help to explain why librarians, given a chance to stop and think, usually have worried faces. Historians speak of "the burden of history." In an age when smart advice says "travel light," we end up with seven pieces of baggage; and latebra that becomes exciting as the lux becomes painful. The thought of what the burden might be after another century is one to break the back of the strongest camel. In response, our library profession mobilizes its efforts, even if needs be through the committee structures that build better camels. Meanwhile, our effort becomes all the more challenging, worthwhile, and even fun, as it defines an institution that just might (and, in gratifying ways, even now often does) help camels work their way through the eyes of the needles.

Further Readings

In the footnotes above, I have tried to signal the difference between writings meant to verify and those meant to tempt (this being, mostly, Patrick Wilson's distinction between describing and prescribing, or De Quincey's between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power mentioned above). But there is also a bottomless store of references that I have not been able to toss into this kitchen sink of an essay, and a few I am sorry about. Every librarian should know Dostoyevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" section from *The Brothers Karamazov*, since it will likely take some years to figure out why (but see footnote 8 above). Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion: An Historical Romance, 1966* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), and Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983—this one alongside "The Library of Babel," whose author might be related to Eco's librarian), and Robert Grudin's *Book* (New York: Random House, 1992)—all are part of the unofficial canonical literature of librarianship, and one good way to size up a librarian is by reading either the shocks of horror or the smiles of delight—or the blank stares—when such titles are evoked.

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[31]Above all, non-Western libraries need to be recognized. Alas, our romantic visions of "bio-diversity" are as vaguely understood as they are attractive. How well do libraries accommodate concepts that are expressible only in "foreign" languages, or the different alphabets they use and the systems of reasoning that lie behind them? The ways in which other libraries reflect other societies, in ways different from our ways—how the Muslim character of mosque libraries make them unlike those we know, for instance—are not easy to grasp. We are thus left wondering whether, and how, our notions of libraries are, and might possibly ever be redefined so as *not* to be, distinct to our Western world.

Closer to home are anthologies, among them the classic *Literature of Libraries in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* by John Cotton Dana and Henry W. Kent (Chicago: McClurg, 1906); John David Marshall's *Books, Libraries, Librarians* and *Of, by, and for Librarians,* Series 1–2 (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1955, 1960, the latter with Wayne Shirley and Louis Shores); John L. Thornton's *A Mirror for Librarians, Classics of Librarianship* and *Further Selected Readings in the History of Librarianship* (London: The Library Association, 1948, 1957, collected as *Selected Readings in the History of Librarianship,* 1966); and Barbara McCrimmon's *American Library Philosophy* (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String, 1975).

Finally, there are the aphorisms, adages, inspirations, witticisms, nuggets, and bromides, anthologized in classics such as Alexander Ireland's *The Book Lover's Enchiridion* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1888). Other collections are listed on pp. 195–96 in my own failed attempt at classroom dialogue, *A Librarian's Collacon* (Urbana, 1991). Other such Golden Treasuries are being distilled at Norman D. Stevens's Molesworth Institute, recently among them *Roses and Thorns: One Hundred Library Quotations* (Storrs, Conn., 1999).